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Excavations and surveys in Israel

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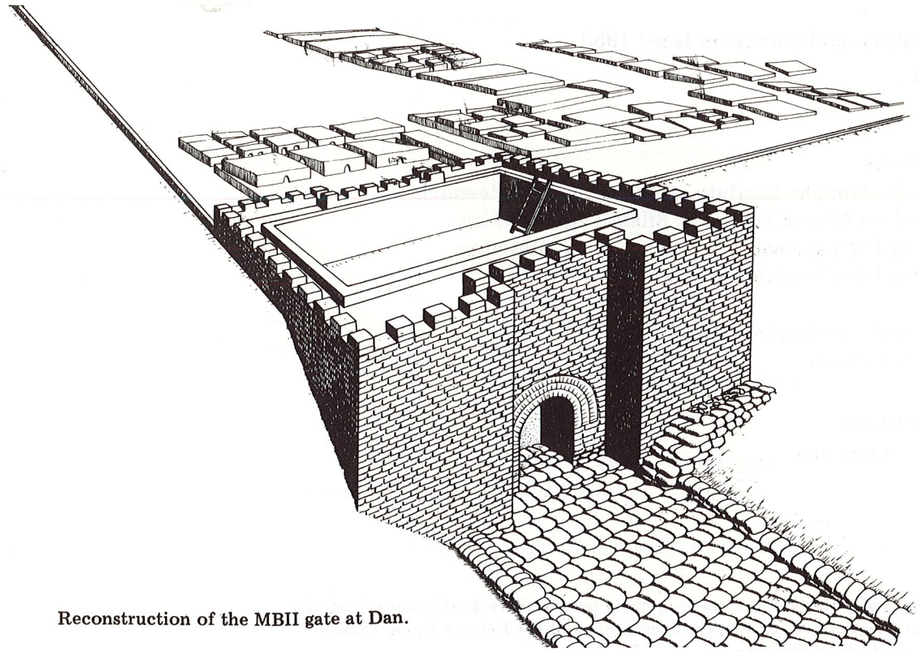

Reconstruction of the MBII gate at Dan.

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Laura of St. Saba in Naḥal Kidron. The team worked outside the walls of the Mar Saba monastery, which has an area of about 60 × 100 m. The monastery lies at the center of the laura, which in Saba's day extended one kilometer along the bluffs on both sides of Naḥal Kidron, south and north of the monastery. Twenty-five monastic dwellings were recorded, some intended for a single person and others for a number of monks.

The Monastery of the Grotto (Spelaion) at Bir el-Qattar was erected around the grotto in which St. Saba was wont to seek solitude. It is of the *coenobium* type, built along about 40 m on the northern bluff of the wadi and destined for a small group of monks (10—15). Next to the grotto entrance, a capital has been preserved *in situ*, attached to the edge of the smoothed rock surface which was originally plastered and on which the pious story of the cave's sanctity used to be written. The finds include a fragment of a marble offering table and a broken marble colonnette with a Corinthian capital (foot of an altar table). These marble fragments come from a church which existed under St. Saba's grotto and which was paved with mosaics ornamented with black designs.

Laura of Jeremiah in Wadi Zaraniq. Here the remains of twelve hermits' cells were surveyed and recorded, as well as the center of the laura, which extended along about 800 m. The cells were connected by paths and a well-built path winds its way eastward towards the Buqei'a (Hyrcania plain).

Monastery of Joannes Scholarius. This is also a monastery of the *coenobium* type which extends over an area of 50 × 60 m on top of Jebel Munṭar. A cross was found carved on one of the doorjambs. Some column fragments probably belong to the church of the monastery.

The Castellion Monastery, built on the ruins of Hyrcania, was explored by Mader in the thirties and by Wright and Milik in the sixties.

During the survey, a system of paths (some masonry-built) between the monasteries was recorded, as well as some sites of the Byzantine period. Eight hillside reservoirs (Arabic *harabbe*) were hewn into the side of the wadi above the streambed, dammed by a wall with a wide opening towards the wadi and fed by long channels. The smaller reservoirs have a single storage chamber (Bir Abu Hindi, Bir Abu Kalb, Bir el-Baquq, Bir el-Qurn and Bir Ḥutba); two reservoirs have two chambers connected by a space at the front (Bir Abu Shu'la and Bir Idarawi). The largest reservoir (Bir Khushne) has three interconnected chambers. The sherds mixed into the hydraulic mortar indicate that Bir Abu Kalb dates from the late Ottoman period, while Bir Ḥutba and Bir el-Baquq can be attributed to the Islamic period.

Six tumuli were recorded, some opened and without any datable material and five burial sites: eṭ-Ṭin, Qabr Mis'if, Majnat Mis'if, Qabr Du'eira and a nameless cemetery.

During the survey of the area above the Hyrcania plain, about fifty sites were recorded.

MAZOR, MAUSOLEUM

The Mazor mausoleum is situated on the road leading from Migdal Aphek, near Rosh Ha'ayin, to Lod. In 1964, the late A. Hiram, at that time Conservator of Monuments in the Department of Antiquities, and Y. Kaplan carried out soundings in preparation for the conservation of this

Roman building, which has been almost completely preserved. Work was resumed in 1982 by Y. Kaplan and Ḥaya Ritter-Kaplan in order to complete the report.

The excellent state of preservation of the building is due to the fact that it was turned into a holy place about two hundred years ago, when a tomb was dug in one of the rooms. From then on the site was called by the name of the man buried there — Maqam Nabi Yaḥya. Near the building are three cisterns, two shaft tombs and a quarry pit. One of these cisterns is 4 m deep. Excavations showed that it was covered with flat stones and rubble. It was fed by rainwater collected from rock-cut channels, while water was taken out from a nearby shaft connected to the cistern by a conduit cut through the rock between them.

The mausoleum consists of two chambers and a portico in classical style. Below the late earth floor of Chamber A, bases of two sarcophagi were uncovered. The other chamber (B) is a columbarium, with irregularly arranged niches. Though the niches were damaged in the course of the centuries, it is estimated that there were about forty. The walls are built of fieldstones dressed only on the outer face, with small stones filling the interstices. Except for the architrave and the capitals, the walls were covered with plaster. The ceiling of Room A was built in the Ḥaurani style, that is, stone arches bridged by long stone slabs. The portico and the columbarium were also roofed with such slabs, but without arches, as the distance between the walls was only 2 m.

This must be the mausoleum of a rich landowner, who allotted burial places inside the building, perhaps for his slaves. The ceramic evidence found in the soundings indicates a date in the early 4th century CE.

ḤORVAT MEṢAD

A third season of excavations at Ḥ. Meṣad was conducted in July-August 1980 by M. Fisher of the Department of Classical Studies, Tel Aviv University, with the assistance of Sara Pilz, A. Shenhav, Ella Stein, A. Franco (area supervisors), G. Tampona, Alexandra Bossi and Julia Moskovitz (surveying and plans), H. Yarom (administration), Liora Netzer and Orit Bergman (registrars). Dr. A. Kindler served as numismatic advisor. The excavation is part of the Emmaus-Sha'ar Hagai project headed by M. Giḥon. Generous assistance was given by the Jewish National Fund and the Thyssen Foundation in Germany. Groups of young volunteers took part in the excavation.

Area A. Additional portions of the Hasmonean fort were uncovered in the eastern part of the site. The entrance to the fort (20 × 15 m) is on the east. The north and south walls (length 15 m) end in the east in two towers, which form a fortified entry room on a stepped rocky surface. The interior of the fort is divided into four rectangular rooms (2 × 3 — 3 × 4 m). Access to the roof or to the second story was by a stairway whose foundations have been preserved. Only two courses of the wall foundations have survived (width 0.8—1.0 m), which are built of fieldstones without mortar. Blocks with dressed margins, reused in later buildings, were probably taken from the upper courses of this fort. The ceramic (mainly fragments of store jars) and numismatic evidence indicate that the fort was erected during the reign of Alexander Jannaeus and seems to have been abandoned a short time after his death. Lead coins of Alexander Jannaeus were found also in this season.

Buildings of the 1st century CE whose remains have been uncovered in this area make use of the leveled foundations of the Hasmonean structure as floors. The southeastern corner of the fort

was turned into a watchtower and the eastern part of the hill was leveled by adding a fill of small stones and early pottery. Two 1st century CE cooking pots were inserted into the pavement and two coins of Year Two of the Jewish War of 66—70 CE were found on this floor in 1978. A rock-cut reservoir (3.5 × 3.5 m) was uncovered in the southeastern corner, dated by its stratigraphic position and by the discovery of a 1st century lamp in a crack in the east wall. In a corner next to the reservoir, pottery and coins were discovered dating from the reign of Herod and until the Jewish War. There is also some evidence of occupation in the Early Arab period.

Area B. A complex of rooms built around a courtyard and enclosed by a wall 1.3 m wide was uncovered in the western part of the site. This is a fortified farmhouse with heating and storage arrangements in the rooms and a rock-cut storage bin in an inner courtyard. The walls are founded on rock and form an addition to the Hasmonean remains. The pottery and coins indicate that this farmhouse was erected in the first half of the 1st century CE and abandoned at the time of the Jewish War. Two coins, one of Year Two and the other of Year Three of the Jewish War, were found in the ashes which covered the floors of the building. In some places changes made shortly before the War can be distinguished, such as ovens in some of the rooms, repairs to walls and floors, raised floors, and additional pottery storage facilities.

Soundings in Area B clarified the stratigraphical position of the late fort on the hilltop. The building was dated in the first season to the Byzantine period by ceramic and numismatic evidence. This season, the dating was confirmed by the discovery of a foundation trench dug into the 1st century CE layers. Stones with dressed margins taken from the Hasmonean and Herodian structures were reused in the construction of this late fort.

Area C. The subterranean reservoir (13 × 7 m) uncovered in this area in previous seasons is partly rock-hewn and partly masonry-built, with plastered walls and a neatly hewn opening for drawing water. There were two openings in the ceiling for the intake of water, one round (diam. 1 m) and the other square (1 × 1 m). These openings were blocked at a later stage, when a large building (16 × 9 m) was erected above the reservoir, including an entrance room and rooms around an inner courtyard. The plastered walls are built of small stones and mortar. The pottery belongs to the Early Arab period and the building may have been a way station.

Two inscribed milestones found on the site and nearby belong to the late 2nd—mid-3rd centuries CE, but as yet no ceramic or numismatic evidence of an occupation in this period has been found. Settlement was renewed in the Byzantine period, on the evidence of coins of Anastasius (486—518 CE).

MEṢAD BE'ER MENUḤA

Several short salvage excavations were carried out at the site between January and June 1983 on behalf of the Department of Antiquities by R. Cohen, assisted by I. Israel, Y. Lender, D. Naḥlieli and I. Watkin (surveyor). The site is located on a commanding hill (map ref. 1627/9686) near Be'er Menuḥa (Well of Menuḥa) and was named after this well. Scholars who visited the region early in this century, like Musil and Frank, knew of the well, but did not notice the ruined structure next to it. Rothenberg, in a survey of the 'Arava in 1960, described the remains as a Nabatean tower.

Two structural phases could be distinguished. In the earlier phase, the building was rectangular (21.0 × 18.5 m) and consisted mainly of rooms 3 m wide around a spacious courtyard (12.5 × 8.0 m). The outer stone walls were preserved to a height of 0.5 m. The ceramic evidence included painted Nabatean bowls, cooking pots, bowls and lamps of the 1st century CE. Of particular interest is a stone bowl bearing a Nabatean inscription, a stone incense stand and coins of the Nabatean kings Ḥaretat II, III and IV and Rab'el II.

A tower (9.5 × 9.5 m) was erected in the center of the courtyard over the ruins of the Nabatean structure. It contained three rooms and a stairway leading to the upper story (length of two northern rooms 4.0 m, width 3.0 m and 4.5 m; width of southern rooms 2.5 m). The sherds found on the floors are from the 2nd—3rd centuries CE. Coins of Trajan and Hadrian were also found.

The fort was erected as a Nabatean way station in the 1st century CE, on a road crossing the 'Arava from north to south. This station was probably destroyed in 106 CE, when the Nabatean kingdom was annexed by the Romans and became the Provincia Arabia. A tower for Roman army use was erected on its ruins in the 2nd or 3rd century CE.

MEṢAD HAR MASSA

Salvage excavations at the site were carried out intermittently between December 1982 and June 1983 on behalf of the Department of Antiquities by R. Cohen, assisted by I. Israel, D. Naḥlieli, Y. Lender and Lea Puranen. I. Watkin was responsible for surveying. The site is situated on a low hill (map ref. 1549/9975) at the foot of Har Massa and was first surveyed in 1982 by a team of the Negev Emergency Survey.

The excavations revealed a rectangular fort (20 × 10 m) consisting of two parallel rows of rooms, seven in the northern row and probably the same number in the southern row, though the walls of only two rooms have survived. The rooms are hewn into the chalky rock of the hill, which served as a foundation for the stone superstructure. The ceramic evidence is of the 1st century CE and includes bowls, among them painted Nabatean bowls, cooking pots, lamps, store jars and an amphora.

This fort is a way station on the Nabatean Petra—Gaza road, between Moa and Meṣad Neqarot.

MEṢAD MA'ALE MAḤMAL

A salvage excavation was conducted at the site in December 1982 on behalf of the Department of Antiquities by R. Cohen, District Archaeologist, Southern District, assisted by I. Israel, N. Sneh, Y. Lender and D. Naḥlieli.

The fort (meṣad) is situated at the top of Ma'ale Maḥmal (map ref. 1431/9111), on the rim of the northern scarp of Makhtesh Ramon. It was first surveyed in 1937 by A. Kirk, who was also the first to visit Ma'ale Maḥmal, and in 1960 by M. Gichon and B. Rothenberg. In 1965, a sounding was carried out by R. Cohen during the survey of the road between Sha'ar Ramon and Avdat.

The fort (7.0 × 6.5 m; see plan) is divided by two square stone piers (0.6 × 0.6 m), which are still standing to a height of 1.8 m. A flight of steps in the western half led to an upper floor. The